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AUTHOR Ryan, Ellen Bouchard; Carranza, Miguel A.
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ABSTRACT

Summarizing recent research on evaluative reactions toward Mexican American speech varieties, the paper obtained contrasting evaluative reactions for standard English versus standard Spanish, for standard English versus highly accented English, and for varying degrees of accented English. Anglo and Mexican American adolescents from a Chicago high school rated the personalities of 16 speakers representing 4 "context x language" categories: English-Home, Spanish-Home, English-School, and Spanish-School. For both groups, there was a definite preference for English in school, and slight preference for Spanish in the home. The important effect of the contextual domain on evaluative reactions toward English and Spanish speakers suggested that the subject takes into account the appropriateness of the speaker's behavior as well as his ethnicity. In eliciting reactions toward standard and accented English, standard speakers received more favorable reactions in every case. The relationship between the amount of accentedness heard and the attributed characteristics of the speaker was also investigated. High correlations between accentedness rating and each of the other ratings indicated that small increments in accentedness are associated with gradually less favorable impressions of the speaker. Overall, the investigations established the effects of context and degree of accent, indicating that group membership is only one factor underlying the reactions. It was also noted that, since the studies were conducted solely in the Chicago area, they revealed only one dimension of the Mexican American adolescent experience. (KM)

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A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF EVALUATIVE REACTIONS OF ADOLESCENTS TOWARD SPEAKERS OF DIFFERENT LANGUAGE VARIETIES

Ellen Bouchard Ryan and Miguel A. Carranza
University of Notre Dame

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In this society which prides itself on academic excellence, bilingualism is both encouraged and discouraged at the same time, being prized in language scholars but disdained in speakers whose mother tongues are associated with other cultures and ways of looking at life (Sanchez, 1966). Mexican Americans, the largest bilingual minority group in the United States, are strongly affected by this ambivalent attitude towards bilingualism. Since, of all non-English mother tongues, it is Spanish that is given the greatest chance for survival (Fishman and Hofman, 1966), this awkward position occupied by the Mexican American is not likely to fade away or decrease significantly in the near future.

Mexican Americans are similar to other minorities in the United States in that they are on the lower rungs of the socioeconomic ladder (Bernal, 1971; and Grebler, et al., 1970). Although a Spanish-speaking Mexican American is ideally given the opportunity to achieve any position he desires, realistically he is severely limited because he is not in tune with the dominant society. A variety of assimilationistic forces exist which pressure him to neglect Spanish, to learn English, and to use English exclusively.

For the Mexican American with Spanish as his mother tongue, becoming bilingual is a necessary process in order to succeed in American society. This process has important

consequences in terms of identity because achieving bilingualism often involves the adoption of the values, attitudes, and motives associated with the second language (Lambert, 1967). For the Mexican American, a positive orientation towards English is frequently accompanied by a negative orientation towards the "inferior" mother tongue. The Mexican American is pushed by political, social, and economic necessity to learn and use English, and to neglect using his mother tongue. On the other hand, he may be encouraged by his sense of personal and group identity to continue the use of his mother tongue, or he may be discouraged from using English by language learning problems or prejudicial reactions toward accented English.

Nowhere is the dilemma of bilingualism for this language minority group more apparent than among Mexican American adolescents in the existing educational system. The problems of conflicting positive and negative reinforcements for both English and Spanish frequently place the Mexican American adolescent in an alienated state which can often involve an identity crisis. The Mexican American adolescent finds himself in a double bind where he has not only the <u>cultural</u> minority status of being Mexican American, but also the <u>social</u> minority status of being an adolescent (Derbyshire, 1968). These researchers see a definite need for research that examines how the Mexican American bilingual adolescent is reacting to these pressures.

The purpose of this paper is to summarize our recent research concerning evaluative reactions toward speech varieties associated with Mexican Americans. More specifically, contrasting evaluative reactions have been obtained for standard English versus standard Spanish, for standard English versus highly accented English of Mexican Americans, and for varying degrees of accented English.

Carranza and Ryan (forthcoming) attempted to discover whether English and Spanish were functionally separate for Mexican American adolescents. Fishman (1971) suggests that for a stable bilingual group, one speech variety (High Language), is often associated with status, high culture, and aspiration toward social mobility, while a second variety (Low Language), may correspond to solidarity, comradeship, and intimacy. In the case of the Mexican American, instead of selecting one language or the other for exclusive use, there is some evidence that he may come to see Spanish as valuable in certain roles and English as valuable in others (Rubel, 1968). The Mexican American may distinguish between the use of Spanish and English with Spanish being the language of intimacy and familial relations, and English the language of high culture, formality, and social mobility.

In dealing with the functional separation of language varieties for speech communities, Agheyisi and Fishman (1970) criticized previous studies of evaluative reactions towards

speech for not having adequately considered the importance of the context of speech. Most of the studies performed have used taped readings with formal topics or spontaneous speech concerning informal topics. In ignoring specific effects due to context, their studies have overlooked a potentially crucial factor in the selection of one language variety over another.

The functional separation of language has also been discussed in terms of which language is spoken in which contextual domain (cf. Barker, 1947; Fishman, et al., 1968; and Stoddard, 1973). This functional separation of speech varieties usually results in the values of solidarity (associated with Low Language) being enacted in the home and neighborhood domains, with the values of status (associated with High Language) being enacted in the school and work domains. For our work, the domains of home and school were employed since they are clearly important and distinct environments for adolescents.

In addition to the manipulation of contextual domain, a distinction was made between status and solidarity rating scales, in an effort to see whether or not the scales were differentially associated with Spanish and English. It was felt that English (High Language) would be viewed as reflecting the status dimension for all members of society, and Spanish (Low Language) as typifying the solidarity dimension for Mexican Americans.

Anglo and Mexican American adolescents from a high school in Chicago rated the personalities of sixteen speakers representing four 'context x language' categories: English-Home, Spanish-Home, English-School, and Spanish-School. For both groups, there was a definite preference for English in the school context, and a slight preference for Spanish in the home context. Also, while English was rated higher than Spanish on both status and solidarity scales, Spanish was rated higher on the solidarity scales than on the status scales. The important effect of the contextual domain on evaluative reactions toward English and Spanish speakers suggests that the subject takes into account the appropriateness of the speaker's behavior as well as his ethnic identity.

Having established that evaluative reactions toward speakers of different languages are formulated with consideration of the appropriateness of the speaker's behavior in mind, Ryan and Carranza (forthcoming) then elicited evaluative reactions toward standard and accented English speech. Accentedness is particularly important for Mexican Americans because, as Ortego (1970) states, the vast majority of bilingual and even monolingual Mexican Americans in the Southwest speak English with an unmistakable influence from Spanish phonology (cf. Metcalf, 1972; and Ornstein, 1971). In addition, an accent can reduce chances for educational and occupational success if it serves to evoke a

prejudicial attitude in the listener toward the speaker (Carter, 1970).

There are numerous references in the literature to the attempts of some Mexican Americans to eliminate any traces of accent from their own speech and that of their children, in the hope of obtaining broader opportunities (cf. Barker, 1947; Krear, 1969; and Sawyer, 1964). But at the same time there are some positive functions served by an accent. Maintaining one's accent may be associated with maintaining one's identity and separateness from the dominant cultural group (Huntsberry, unpublished; and Lambert, 1967).

In light of these negative and positive social and psychological attributes of accented speech, this study explored reactions toward speakers of standard English and accented English. Anglo, Black, and Mexican American adolescent females rated the personalities of male speakers of standard English and Mexican American accented English. As in Carranza and Ryan (forthcoming), manipulation of speech context (home and school) and rating dimension (status and solidarity) was employed to demonstrate the functional separation of speech styles.

Although standard English speakers received more favorable ratings in every case, the differences were significantly greater in the school context than in the home context, and for the status ratings than for the solidarity ratings. Contrary to expectations, Mexican Americans did not prefer accented English in the home context or on the

solidarity scales. The results confirmed the prediction that the functional separation of language varieties would be reflected in evaluative reactions toward speakers of standard English and accented English. Moreover, this study again helped to clarify a theoretical issue, in demonstrating that a rater takes into account the appropriateness of the speaker's language as well as clues to his group identity.

Having confirmed that evaluative reactions to speakers are affected by accented speech, Ryan et al. (unpublished) attempted to determine whether such reactions would be sensitive to small differences in degrees of accentedness. In a previous experiment, Brennan et al. (forthcoming) demonstrated through the use of psychophysical scales of magnitude estimation and sensory modality matching that non-linguistically trained listeners can give quantitatively reliable judgments of the accentedness of English speech samples. In this third evaluative reaction study, the relationship between the amount of accentedness heard and the attributed characteristics of the speaker was investigated. The college student subjects made rather fine discriminations among varying degrees of accentedness in rating a speaker's personal attributes and speech. The high correlations between accentedness ratings and each of the other ratings indicate that small increments in accentedness are associated with gradually less favorable impressions of the speaker.

In reviewing the findings of these three studies, it is essential to note their limitations and to suggest improvements or alternatives for further research. First of all, the studies were conducted in the Chicago area, and as such reveal only one dimension of the Mexican American adolescent experience. Collaborative research by investigators in various parts of the country is needed in order to provide an overall perspective. Second, although the importance of the context was established, manipulation of that variable was very limited. In addition to varying the topic, one could also vary the testing place. For example, the ratings could be collected in the homes or neighborhood recreation centers. Third, even though the ratings on status and solidarity scales did differ somewhat, further study of rating dimensions is certainly in order. Fourth, the distinction between speech styles was limited to reading pronunciations in these particular studies. Future studies could easily introduce greater variation by utilizing spontaneous speech, thereby including lexical and grammatical differences. Eventually it would be desirable to collect reactions to the whole range of English and Spanish speech styles available to Mexican Americans (Chacon, 1969; and Penalosa, 1972).

There seem to be various aspects to the evaluative reaction process. Our results are not consistent with the standard view that evaluative reactions to speakers involve

a two-stage process of inference, which consists of first identifying a speaker's group membership, and then applying the associated stereotypes (Robinson, 1972). Indeed, our investigations established the effects of context and degree of accent, thus indicating that group membership is only one factor underlying the reactions. Clearly, much additional exploration is necessary before definitive statements concerning the evaluative reactions of adolescents toward speakers of different language varieties can be made. It is hoped that our research presents useful methodological contributions toward the attainment of this goal.

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